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ABSTRACT

This report presents findings from Delta, one of four school districts examined in a series of case studies that investigated the complex relationship between reading assessment and instruction. The research was situated in the context of school decision making. Teachers, principals, parents, students, and central office staff were interviewed to determine how decisions were made in the district and how that decision-making process influenced assessment and instruction. In addition, teachers were observed, and discussions were conducted with them about the observations. A constant comparative method was used to identify patterns in the data. In Delta, assessment-as-test had a major impact on curriculum and instruction. The superintendent was concerned about the "low" test scores of the students in his district and wanted to raise those scores. A number of decisions had been made to accomplish this (e.g., standards had been set for passing from one grade to another; teachers were asked to modify their teaching so that scores on particular test items would improve). There was a considerable amount of tension in this district over the way these "top down" decisions had been made. There were also, however, a number of other decision-making structures operating: district-wide committees, for example, that were charged with writing curriculum. Delta seemed to be a district in transition in which both "old" ways (top-down decision making, assessment-as-test driving instruction) and new ways (collaboration between teachers and administration, teacher decision making) sometimes conflict with each other. (One table and two figures of data are included; a letter to prospective schools describing the research project, and a list of interview and observation codes are attached.) (Author/RS)

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Center for the Study of Reading

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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF READING

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Abstract

This report presents findings from Delta, one of four school districts examined in a series of case studies that investigated the complex relationship between assessment and instruction. The research was situated in the context of school decision making. Teachers, principals, parents, students, and central office staff were interviewed to determine how decisions were made in the district and how that decision-making process influenced assessment and instruction. In addition, teachers were observed, and discussions were conducted with them about the observations. The interviews were taperecorded and transcribed, and field notes from the observations were elaborated. A constant comparative method was used to identify patterns in the data. In Delta, assessment-as-test had a major impact on curriculum and instruction. The superintendent was concerned about the "low" test scores of the students in his district and wanted to raise those scores. A number of decisions had been made to accomplish this (e.g., standards had been set for passing from one grade to another; teachers were given the results of an item analysis, based on standardized test data, and asked to modify their teching so that scores on particular items would improve). There was a considerable amount of tension in this district over the way these "top down" decisions had been made. There were also, however, a number of other decision-making structures operating: districtwide committees, for example, that were charged with writing curriculum. Delta seemed to be a district in transition in which both "old" ways (top-down decision making, assessment-as-test driving instruction) and new ways (curricular collaboration between central office, principals, and teachers; opportunities for teachers to make their own decisions) sometimes conflicted with each other.

ASSESSMENT AND DECISION MAKING IN DELTA

The field of reading education generally seems to agree that assessment (defined as *test*) drives instruction, that is, teachers teach to the test. Indeed, only Haney (1984, 1985) argues that it does not; he concludes that testing affects only the surface characteristics of instruction. A review of the literature suggests that these opinions have been, for the most part, grounded in large-scale studies--studies indicating that teaching practices change in response to pressures to increase performance or "do well" on standardized, norm-referenced tests (See, e.g., Herman & Dorr-Bremme, 1983; Popham et al. 1985; Salmon-Cox, 1981).

What we wanted to understand, however, was how standardized tests impacted lives in particular classrooms in particular districts. This led to several questions: What was life like in a school that was attempting to raise its test scores? Were daily patterns in those schools different from the lives of teachers and students in schools that did not seem highly invested in raising test scores? We had read of teachers, for example, who "taught to the test"; we wanted a closer and yet broader understanding of what that meant. We wondered, for example, about the relationship of textbook orders (kind and company) to the test. Might an individual feel unaffected by test pressures and yet be required to use materials that had been specifically chosen to match test items? And what about policies for passing versus retention? Might a teacher feel relatively free from test pressures during the year but then be told that only students with certain reading levels could pass to the next grade, a grade in which standardized tests were administered?

In order to move our understanding from the abstract ("research says that testing drives instruction") to the concrete (what does this mean in the lives of particular teachers/schools/districts?), we conducted case-study research in four school districts. We chose districts we thought would have different ideas about the relationship between assessment and instruction: (a) a district with a reputation for being a "low stakes" district--scores were acknowledged and then filed; (b) a "high stakes" or test-driven district; (c) a district known for its high test scores and its belief that the consistent pattern of such scores gave it license to do pretty much whatever they wanted (although the district felt that the community would "pull in the reins" if test scores ever dropped); and (d) a district concerned about its test scores because of how they were perceived in their community. This district worried that what they considered "low" test scores meant that their reading program needed to be changed. The four districts were subsequently given the pseudonyms Alpha, Beta, Gamma, and Delta.

We chose and contacted the first three districts, explaining our interest to central office personnel and asking if their district would be willing to participate in the study. Meanwhile, Delta's superintendent contacted us and asked to participate in the study. Delta subsequently became the fourth site.[1]

In our conversations with school personnel, we explained (see confirming letter in appendix A) that our interest was in the relationship between standardized tests and instruction, and that we wanted to situate both tests and instruction within a broader framework of instructional decision making so that we could better understand the more subtle influences of one on the other (e.g., textbook purchasing policies). We also explained that we were interested in the seldom talked about assessment that was not test (e.g., teacher observation) and the relationship of that form of assessment to instruction. All participants, therefore, understood that we were interested in decision making as it related to assessment (both as test and not-as-test) and instruction.

Before the study began, and based on time and staff limitations, we decided to focus on two teachers per building, two buildings per district. The districts responded differently to our plan. In Alpha,

[1]The four case studies are available as Center for the Study of Reading Technical Reports.

central office staff notified all teachers that we wanted to conduct a study and asked them to contact us if they were interested. In that district, seven teachers in one building participated and two in another. In Beta, central office staff decided which buildings and teachers would participate. In Gamma and Delta, central office staff invited teachers and principals to a meeting to hear about the study and then choose two schools from among those interested.

We used interviews and observations as our means of collecting data. We interviewed key participants in all four sites: central office personnel, principals, teachers, parents, and students. The interviews with teachers were tied to our observations of their classrooms. The first interview was held prior to the first observation. Conversation-like interviews followed each of three observations. The fifth interview followed the final observation. With the participants' permission, the interviews were taperecorded and transcribed. Field notes were taken during the observations and elaborated afterward. These field notes were returned to the participants for their comments and, when appropriate, further elaboration.

The observations provided an opportunity to ground our interview questions in the concreteness of people's personal experiences. We could see which books people used, how papers were graded, how students were responded to,and were then be able to ask about the relationship of those classroom-based decisions to the broader issues of assessment and instruction.

The data (audiotapes and elaborated fieldnotes) were then read and coded, using descriptive codes (see Appendix B). Tenuous labels emerged from the initial reading of the data. These codes were revised and refined until the codes adequately captured the content of what we had seen and heard. The codes were intended to facilitate analysis. The process of careful, descriptive coding also focused our reading of the data and helped us begin to identify patterns in the data.

After the coding had been completed, one member of the research team took primary responsibility for each site. A constant comparative approach was used in the analysis. Each researcher read and re-read the data, looking for and identifying patterns in the data. Once patterns had been identified, the data were read at least one more time for evidence that might disconfirm those patterns. The researcher then presented those patterns in a case study that aptly captured what we had learned about assessment and instruction in that district. Meanwhile, members of the research team continued to meet with each other, sharing possibilities and patterns. Four case studies were subsequently written and are available as Technical Reports.[2]

These case studies were returned to all participants for their feedback and changes, as necessary, were made in subsequent versions of the case studies.

Once we had a clear understanding of the patterns within districts, the data were read again. This time a new member of the research team, building conceptually on the analysis done in each district, re-analyzed all the data to identify patterns across districts. The data were then re-read to confirm those patterns and identify salient examples, and read a final time to find negative cases, instances in which the pattern could not be confirmed. Once all patterns were confirmed, and therefore considered trustworthy, a cross-site analysis was prepared.[3]

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[2]A fifth case study was conducted in Ohio. It is also available as a Technical Report.

[3]The cross-site analysis is also available as a Technical Report.

The District in Context

As noted in the introduction, we decided to situate our study of the relationship between assessment and instruction in the framework of decision making. We subsequently asked the school districts of Alpha, Beta, and Gamma to participate in the research because we had reason to believe their decision making processes differed from each other. We became guests in their districts, but we had invited ourselves in.

Delta, however, invited us. The superintendent of Delta, Dr. Harkin, contacted the University of Illinois, asking for someone to consult with him about the district's reading program. The State of Illinois recently had begun administering reading tests in Grades 3, 6, and 8, and the superintendent explained that the district was not pleased with its scores on those tests. He wanted to improve reading instruction and raise test scores. In response to his call, Diane Stephens, a faculty member at the University of Illinois, agreed to meet with Delta administrators and teachers to understand and make recommendations about their reading program. During one of her conversations with Dr. Harkin, Diane mentioned the study reported here. Dr. Harkin was quite interested and wanted to know if Delta could be involved. He felt that by participating in the study, Delta would learn more about itself and about other districts. He wanted Delta to be "better," to do a "better" job, and felt that involvement in this study would help Delta make decisions about needed changes.

Diane carried Dr. Harkin's request back to the research team. Delta seemed different from the other sites we had already selected. Although Delta's demographic data and test scores were similar to Alpha's and Beta's (see Appendix C and D), Delta was displeased with its scores. Alpha and Beta seemed comfortable with theirs. Alpha and Beta also seemed comfortable with their approach to reading and with their decision making processes; Delta did not. At this point, we knew little about Gamma. What we did know suggested that its test scores were higher and its population significantly different from those in Alpha, Beta, or Delta. For these reasons, Delta seemed reasonably "different" and so became our fourth site.

Dr. Harkin subsequently arranged an initial meeting so that the research project could be explained to interested principals and teachers. He invited the principals of three schools and asked each principal to select three teachers. Afterwards, Dr. Harkin decided which schools and teachers would participate in the study. At Delta I, where Dr. Singer was principal, Ms. Betts, first grade, and Ms. Jones, fourth grade, would participate; at Delta II, we would be working with Mr. Hayes, the prinicpal, Ms. Ames, fifth grade, and Ms. Donovan, first grade.

Arranging to Visit

Both Gamma and Delta were located some distance from the university, but within reasonable driving distance to each other. As we needed to be observing in classrooms when the day started, research team members decided to make three 3-day trips. Juggling the schedules of seven research team members and seven participants from each district (four teachers, two principals, the superintendent and the assistant superintendent), with the constraints of data collection (we needed time between observations to write up field notes and transcribe interviews), we negotiated a rather complex schedule. Once the mega-structure was in place (we knew where we would be each day and what we would be doing), we called the teachers to double-check arrangements. Everything seemed fine.

We called again a few days before the first scheduled visit and found that three of the four Delta teachers would be unavailable the second day of our visit. Instead of being in the classroom, the teachers would be attending a meeting of the district reading committee--a meeting that had been scheduled after the research agenda had been arranged. One teacher also indicated that she thought that Diane would be at that district meeting.

A phone call to central office cleared up the miscommunication, but did not resolve the scheduling problem. The reading committee meeting had been set for that day because the chair was aware that Diane would be in town and thought that she might be able to attend, as consultant. Somehow it had not been communicated that Diane would be in town primarily as researcher and would be unable to attend meetings during the school day because she would be in classrooms. There was also some misunderstanding about the scheduling of observations. Although the district was aware that we were in town to visit classrooms of specific teachers, it was somehow not communicated that asking those teachers to attend a meeting would interfere with the observation schedule.

It was an unfortunate miscommunication. What was particularly interesting about this miscommunication however was that the tensions it caused for the research team seemed similar to the tensions that some of the teachers had mentioned when Diane visited the district as consultant. In both cases, the source of tension seemed to lie in good intentions. Indeed, these early events foreshadowed patterns that became evident later on in the study. Over time, we came to understand Delta as a district experiencing and struggling with the tensions and ambiguities that accompany change. During our visits there, we developed a sense of the complexities and difficulties of school improvement.

Visiting Classrooms

The classrooms of Ms. Ames, Ms. Betts, Ms. Donovan, and Ms. Jones were each observed three times. Each teacher was interviewed at least twice by the observing researcher: once prior to, and once following the observations. That researcher also interviewed a student from the class.

Delta I Elementary School

Delta I was located in the middle of a neighborhood of winding streets and small, single-family homes and apartment buildings, and was across the street from a playground. The school was a one-story building with few windows visible from the street. It was shaped like a multi-leaved clover; each leaf representing a conglomerate of classrooms. The library--learning resource center (LRC)--was at the center of the school, near the small main office, and was accessible to the rest of the school by two permanently open entrances at opposite ends of the room. The main classrooms (the leaves) extended from the library (stem). Each classroom had a windowed door that led directly outdoors onto a parking lot; some classrooms also had a double window. The two basketball hoops on the blacktop were the only evidence of recreational equipment. Ms. Betts explained that the reason they did not have other permanent playground equipment for the children was because the school board and principal decided it would cause insurance problems. It was recently decided, however, that children could play with balls during recess.

Ms. Betts, First Grade

On the three days that we visited, each day proceeded in a similar fashion: the children came in, were greeted, recited the pledge, went over the date, did some board work and listened to directions about their work for the morning. While the children did their work, Ms. Betts met with the reading groups. Each reading group lesson lasted about 20 minutes. Ms. Betts explained, though, that sometimes she would work with the children "in different waves. . .sometimes I will take the lower group first and we will practice some words. And, that's all they can handle at the time. They go back and do a little seat work. I take another group and. . .then I call the (low) group back again. We might do a little reading."

Ms. Betts noted that the children were grouped "from kindergarten" but that she felt the district was very flexible with that. She could change a child's placement by testing the child: "Basically, that's what they ask of us--that we make sure that we test them and make sure they've mastered the basic skills that are required." If children got at least 80% correct on the unit test, they could go on to the next book. The

test covered "sounds and digraphs. . .isolated words. . .putting words in context. . .[and] comprehension." For comprehension, the children were given "a little story that is already in order, and they have to pick out which was the first sentence, which was the second one. . . ."

When the children finished their morning work, they could choose from a list of activities posted on the chalkboard:

1. Play with clay
2. Activity book
3. Enjoy a book
4. Draw a picture
5. Practice your words
6. Make a fun pack
7. "Do" pages
8. Center work

Each day the children also went, by reading group, to the LRC. Ms. Betts explained that "children in the top group are able to read a story and answer questions, so she [the learning center teacher] will do those sorts of things [with them]. . . . With the rest of the group, they just follow directions, story reading, isolated sounds, skill work. They have boxes [published by Developmental Learning Materials and Modern Curriculum Press] they can go through." Ms. Betts and the other teachers helped make decisions about what the children should be doing while in the LRC. This year, for example, "the Learning Center teacher had never had first grade before and she asked, 'What boxes. . .would be appropriate?'" The teachers told her what boxes to use.

In her classroom, Ms. Betts used a variety of texts adopted by the district. She explained that the approach she used was "whole language" and that she tried "to use it through everything. . ." "take a bit of your science, take a bit of reading, take a little bit of your vocabulary words and let's write." Ms. Betts thought that there were other teachers in the district who were "whole language" teachers, "but I don't think they know that they are doing it." As examples of whole language, she listed SQ3R, DRTA, and noted that the researcher would see a little whole language in how she "set up seatwork." Ms. Betts also considered the oral language discussions as "whole language." Ms. Betts characterized the first observation day (detailed below) as "typical," explaining that she wanted the researcher to be able to see "what we do in the trenches."

A "typical" day: April 14. After opening exercises, Ms. Betts explained to the children their morning work: a worksheet on "Verbs in the Present and Past," a pack of worksheets on long *a*, and a "fun sheet" containing a picture of a kite that they could color and cut out. In discussing morning work, Ms. Betts explained to us that children from different reading groups sit next to each other, so "if someone has trouble with the seatwork, they can always ask one of their friends on either side of them." She further explained that the "fun sheet is always social studies--the seasons, Christopher Columbus, whatever is going on . . . during the month."

When she finished the directions, most of the students began doing their morning work. Eight children left the room with their Learning Center folders, and five met with Ms. Betts for reading group.

Ms. Betts began this first group by pointing at information on a chart that was propped on the chalkboard (Ms. Betts made her own charts rather than using the charts that came with the basal series). She asked the children to first read the title, and then make up sentences for each of the words listed. As they did so, Ms. Betts talked about the sounds that the words made:

Ms. Betts: One of the skills is going to be this today.

Alice: U.

Ms. Betts: Remember, the Indian sound.

Students: Uuuu.

(Ms. Betts explained that she often used clue words for sounds; in this case, "We say American Indians say 'ugh'; we use this as a clue word or sound for short *u*.")

She then asked the children to read all the short *u* words, as well as to provide a short *u* word for the blank in sentences she provided orally (e.g., "I will have to put a _____ in the box to work."). The five children were also asked to read, from the chart, words that ended in *sh*, *ll*, or *nd*.

The children then made up a pretend story using the words on the chart. After they had done so, and talked about real versus pretend, Ms. Betts asked the children to read the story individually, either sitting at the table or on the floor. She told the children "to see if our story is like theirs." When the children had finished reading, they came back to their seats at the table. Ms. Betts asked the children questions about what they had read:

Ms. Betts: Tad, what was the title of our story?

Tad: The house.

Ms. Betts: Andrea, what would be the setting of this story? (Andrea pauses). Take a look at the picture.

Andrea: A house.

Ms. Betts: Uhum. What about the characters, Ann?

Ann: A man and a woman.

Ms. Betts: Carin, what else? Any animals?

Carin: Dog.

Ms. Betts: What was the problem? Terry?

Terry: The house was sad.

Ms. Betts: Do you think a house has feelings like a person? (Some students shake their heads no.)

Carin: It was old.

Ms. Betts: Nancy, what else?

Nancy: It was dirty and no one was in it.

Ms. Betts: What was the solution?

Student: They all mopped and cleaned.

Ms. Betts: What happened?

Student: They had a party.

After this discussion, Ms. Betts noted that the story they had read was a poem, briefly discussed poems, and then asked the children to take turns reading the poem aloud. The children did so, each taking turns being the "teacher," that is, telling the others when to begin reading.

When the children finished reading, Ms. Betts asked two of the children for examples of rhyming words and then told them to turn to page 61 in their workbooks. (When the children found the correct page, they raised one finger. Ms. Betts told us later that this was a "Hunter" technique. Other "Hunter" techniques included snapping and clapping. Although she began using these techniques because "we were told that we had to," Ms. Betts acknowledged that "in some points, I see it as being real valuable.")

Ms. Betts next explained the directions for the pages she wanted them to complete, sometimes going over the entire page orally with them, and discussed directions for a worksheet pack she distributed. The children then took their work to their desks, got their Learning Center folders, and left the room. Meanwhile, the first Learning Center group had returned to the room and was working on the worksheets passed out earlier.

Ms. Betts called a second reading group back to the table. She asked the children to "take a few minutes to read your new words over. Think about the sounds. *Ou*. Long." She gave them a list of words to practice sounding out to themselves, in whispers, in front of their chairs. They then began to play what Ms. Betts referred to as a "word game"--the children read from a list of words from the first story of the next unit. The object of the game was to continue pronouncing the words correctly so that you didn't have to sit down. Both before and during the game, Ms. Betts helped the children with their pronunciation. For example, when Gabe had trouble reading *shout*:

Gabe: Shoot.

Ms. Betts: Ou. . . . What's *ou*?

Gabe: Ooo.

Ms. Betts: What are you going to say if someone pricks you?

Gabe: Ouch?

Ms. Betts: No. You say "ow."

At the end of the game, the children who were left standing took a plastic toy from a fish bowl. (By the end of the day, all the children had had an opportunity to play the game; each group with a different word list. Ms. Betts explained that the game was "geared so that everyone should get an award. Unfortunately, depending on the week, some children don't." She pointed out however that this particular week "only 5 children didn't get a prize and 20 did.")

On this particular day, the third reading group met in the afternoon. There were nine children in this group, and Ms. Betts began by asking the children if they had practiced their vocabulary words. Assured that they had done so, she then read some sentences and asked them to fill in the blank (e.g., "The bird sits in his _____." Ms. Betts noted that she made up the sentences, "because the manual gives only

isolated words, not in context."). The children next played a contraction game (e.g., Ms. Betts raised one hand and said, "Is," raised the other hand and said, "Not." The children then clapped and said, "Isn't.").

After the contraction game, Ms. Betts drew the children's attention back to the chart, discussing other words listed there, and occasionally asking the children to make up sentences for some of the words. She then, referring to the teacher's manual, began to ask questions about the story (e.g., "Who wanted Penny in our story?" and "Did the bird go to the birdhouse?" Ms. Betts explained that she often referred to questions in the manual "to make sure I'm not asking all literal type questions. I want to make sure I include some interpretive type questioning also.")

After the story had been discussed in this fashion, Ms. Betts asked the children to form pairs and read to each other. She explained that the groups practice different skills (e.g., reading independently or reading with each other) and that she alternated daily.

When the children finished reading with their partners, they returned to the table to go over the worksheets they would be doing. The worksheets dealt with consonant blends and story sequencing. Ms. Betts explained that "workbook pages are for group activities on specific skills, including comprehension. And the sheets I pass out are called 'skillpad sheets' so the children work and practice the same skill independently. This gives me an idea who has mastered the skill."

Ms. Jones, Fourth Grade

Ms. Jones explained that students in fourth and fifth grades were grouped by ability for reading. Group placement was determined by administering the placement test provided by the textbook publisher. Placement was not rigid, and Ms. Jones described how she might decide to move a student into another group:

> Sometimes I've seen them read in other situations in class, their participation was so excellent and [I] wondered why they weren't in [my] reading group because [mine] is higher.
>
> Ms. Jones, 4/21/89

She said she would then look at their Iowa Test of Basic Skills scores, talk to the parents and to the child, and make a decision.

Reading class was scheduled for one hour each day and students went to the classroom of the teacher who taught the group in which they were placed. On Thursdays and Fridays, half of each group was scheduled for the Learning Center. Ms. Jones explained that, because of this scheduling arrangement, she had made the decision this year "to abandon the regular [reading] curriculum . . . and to do plays" on those days.

One of the plays we observed was "Calamity Jane." Ms. Jones began the lesson by distributing a worksheet and asking the students to sit in the middle of the room.

> Ms. Jones: What do you think of when I say the Wild West?
>
> Students offer answers such as bulls, horses, guns, gold, a lot of sheriffs.
>
> Ms. Jones: How long ago was the Wild West?

Students mention other things they connect with the Wild West.

Ms. Jones: Let's take a look at this sheet before we do our play.

Fieldnotes, Ms. Jones' Classroom, 4/21/89

The sheet was a vocabulary worksheet containing words from the Wild West play that Ms. Jones thought might not be familiar to the majority of her students. She asked different students to read aloud information from the worksheet about the Gold Rush, mountain men, the Pony Express and the Transcontinental Railroad. Ms. Jones then said, "We've got a little background. Now we're going to take parts." She assigned parts and handed out props, including cowboy hats and bandannas. When the students were ready to begin, she held up a "Quiet, Please" sign and said, "Quiet on the set." The students read their parts aloud, with some adopting accents and becoming animated. They clapped at the end. Ms. Jones concluded, "So now you know how Calamity Jane got her name."

During both observations, Ms. Jones returned to "regular work" when the students who had been at the learning center returned to class. One day, for example, she distributed to the whole class blue strips with phrases on them. Students were directed to come up by rows, put their strip on the board, and read it. She explained, "These phrases come from a story we'll read on Monday."

Ms. Jones then began talking about prediction, and asked the students to make up a story incorporating the phrases on the board. They took turns offering parts of the story orally. Ms. Jones allowed the students to "add a lot" if they wanted, as long as the ideas fit their storyline. After they finished their story, she told them that on Monday they'd use the phrases to tell the real story.

She continued the lesson by introducing three words, including "Caramba" and "Anda." When a student said, "It's Spanish," Ms. Jones acknowledged, "Brian speaks Spanish." Ms. Jones told the students that the title of the story was "The Street of the Flowerboxes" and asked them where they'd seen flowerboxes. She brought out a flowerbox and mounted it on the chalkboard. Ms. Jones then asked the students about the appearance of petunias, and said, "To make sure we know what a petunia looks like, let's open our books . . . ." The lesson ended with the students reading silently.

Delta II Elementary School

Delta II Elementary School was located on a main street in a grid-like neighborhood composed of medium-sized single family homes. The school had a playground with recreational equipment. The two-story building was brightly colored inside and carpeted. The LRC was located in the center of the second floor and was a few feet lower than the rest of that level. The main office and classrooms were located along the circumference of this area. Classrooms were grouped in what were called "pods." Walls within pods were movable; it was possible, but not necessary, to have six classrooms per pod.

Ms. Donovan, First Grade

The walls of Ms. Donovan's classroom were covered with children's writing, story maps, and children's drawings. On the wall to ceiling chalkboard, Ms. Donovan had copied three stories that two of the children had written. The first story was about frogs:

A frog is an animal that has smooth and cool skin.

It has two hind legs for jumping up and two front legs to help it come down.

Its eyes are on top of its head. It has three eyelids. It closes its inner eye while swimming. Its eyes can go in and out.

Frogs ears are in back of their eyes.

Frogs are only about two inches tall.

Frogs lay eggs in the pond and they are covered with jelly. Tadpoles hatch in 4-20 days.

They breathe with gills.

Tadpoles grow legs fast.

A frog cannot drink water through its mouth. It takes water through its skin.

It has a long sticky tongue.

It grows new skin like a snake but a frog eats its old skin.

Fieldnotes, Ms. Donovan's classroom, 4/14/89

These stories had been written by two students, Mark and Michael, whom Ms. Donovan tutored after school. Initially, Mark and Michael had read the stories to the class. All of the children became quite interested in the stories and subsequently read the stories themselves, often standing in front of the chalkboard reading the stories during the day.

The day officially began at 8:50 and was organized around numerous theme-related science, reading, writing, and social studies activities plus instruction in math and phonics. In her comments to the fieldnotes, Ms. Donovan wrote that the April themes were rain (wet weather), growing things (plants-science unit), water animals (*Yertle the Turtle*), and cooperation. Reading was integrated into all activities.

On one of the days we observed, for example, Ms. Donovan began by asking what day it was and what famous person was born on that day. Discussion of Noah Webster's birthday led to a literacy lesson:

Ms. Donovan: But first we are going to talk about whose birthday it is and then Mark will come up here and share his book.

She then goes on to talk about Noah Webster and the dictionary and asks the children what a dictionary is.

Sandy: It's a place where you look things up.

Ms. Donovan asks what kinds of things, and the children give examples of things they might look up.

Ms. Donovan writes *word* on the board and asks Mark what that says.

Mark: Word.

Ms. Donovan: Do you know why I asked you, Mark? Because yesterday. . . .

Mark: My "what is it" [an art/vocabulary activity] was a word.

Ms. Donovan: Right--and what was the word?

Mark: Fly.

Ms. Donovan: Right--and I heard you ask how to spell that word

Ms. Donovan continues to talk to the children about words--discussing what kinds of words there are (e.g., nouns, and verbs such as *preening*) and about the history of the dictionary and how it can be used (guide words, etc.).

Fieldnotes, Ms. Donovan's classroom, 4/14/89

The discussion of Noah Webster continued, and afterwards Mark read the book he had written. Both students and teacher commented on the book as it was being read; for example, Stacy commented, "This is the funny picture, guys!" and another child remarked, "Look how big that rope is!"

After this sharing, Ms. Donovan introduced the work for the day, often beginning with a discussion of vocabulary or a phonics lesson. This particular day she led a discussion about *l* blends, asking students to name words that contain an *l* blend:

Samantha: Club. CL.

Ms. Donovan: In your books you had a picture of a club for this. What other kinds of clubs are there?

Tony: A health club.

Ms. Donovan: Yes, that's another kind of club. A health club. Your mother belongs to a health club, doesn't she, Robert?

Fieldnotes, Ms. Donovan's classroom, 4/13/89

On another day, Ms. Donovan talked with the students about three thematically-related words she had written on the board: *germinate*, *resource* and *mill*, and asked students to look those words up in the dictionary. In the discussion that ensued, she explained to the students how to use a dictionary; she also pointed that out using a dictionary can be a "good habit" and shared how the dictionary helped two of the students when they were reading *The Velveteen Rabbit*. She also asked the students about other ways to figure out a word they did not know. In that conversation, she suggested both that children could look at the pictures for help and that they could reread.

The remainder of the day was focused on activities related to the current theme. During the time we observed, children made paper, planted seeds, listened to and discussed books about plants and trees. Morning "work" was most often thematically related. The day that students planted seeds, they were given a worksheet that explained how to plant a seed and how seeds grew. Their task was to sequence the steps involved in planting a seed. In this way, reading was woven into activities throughout the day.

Some students also received small-group reading instruction. Four students, including Mark and Michael, went to another classroom for reading. At the same time, a few students from another classroom joined with students in Ms. Donovan's room to form a group of 10. In this way, additional instruction was provided above and beyond what was woven into the day.

In the group for which Ms. Donovan provided instruction, the children were working on inventions. The reading lesson began with some students sharing plans for, discussing problems related to, and/or demonstrating their inventions. One invention, for example, was called Handy Hand, a stuffed rubber glove that protruded from the side of a box. When a string was pulled, a bell inside the box rang and the hand moved up and down. Handy Hand was an alarm clock and the inventor walked around the group, "waking up" children who were pretending to be sleeping. While this was occurring, one student explained to the researcher that the group had read a book, *Snaggle Doodle*, that was about a group of inventors, so they decided to be inventors too.

After everyone had an opportunity to share, Ms. Donovan told the group that today they would be working on story maps. She told the three boys they could work together if they wanted to. One girl's group had already been formed, and the remaining girls became the third group. Ms. Donovan had large pieces of paper (5' X 5') on which she had written the title of the story, "No Smiles Today," and around that, these words: characters, problems, setting, events, goal, and conclusion. She gave each group a sheet and markers and told them that they were to decide who would have which role (secretary, listener, etc.) and that each group was to make a story map of the story. She spent some time helping each of the groups get started. The reading group students then worked independently on the story map while Ms. Donovan checked in with the rest of the students.

On a subsequent day with this reading group, still working on inventions, Ms. Donovan emphasized the need to work cooperatively--another theme of the month.

> After they have discussed both inventions [by students], and the music box, Ms. Donovan asks them how the groups went yesterday. She tells them that she could have made it easy and done it differently but that she wanted them to do some thinking and that it was important, too, for them to have the experience of working with other people. At first, the children say that there were no problems, and Ms. Donovan responds back, "No problems?" This leads to a discussion of the problems that some of the groups had. The children describe their problem, and Ms. Donovan asks, "What do you think was causing all the problems?" and then "What could be done to help with that?" At one point, she says that maybe they learned that everyone can't be a boss, and when she says that, she looks in Jessica's direction. She asks if everyone understands that.
>
> Fieldnotes, Ms. Donovan's classroom, 4/14/89

Reading groups ended about 15 minutes before lunch, and during those 15 minutes, students continued on morning work and/or began small-group activities such as making paper or planting seeds with Ms. Donovan. In the afternoon (which we did not observe), children continued with these projects and worked on their writing.

Ms. Ames, Fifth Grade

Fifth-grade students were grouped for reading, and Ms. Ames taught the "average" group. She instructed them as a whole group and then provided activities that involved students working in smaller groups. Ms. Ames explained that a full 60 minutes of instruction was an advantage of whole-group instruction, a technique she had also used the previous year. It was an instructional arrangement that she felt comfortable with and thought was efficient.

On one day we observed, after the students had changed classes for reading, Ms. Ames began the lesson with a discussion of the stories they had read in their basal, sections excerpted from books: *The Lion,*

The Witch and the Wardrobe and *My Side of the Mountain*. She used the teacher's manual as a guide for the questions. Lessons about vocabulary became integrated into the conversation:

Ms. Ames: Turn to page 396. Think about how the two stories we have read are alike.

Ron raises his hand.

Ron: There are two characters in common.

Ms. Ames: How are they similar? Frank?

Frank: They both spied on people.

A girl says they were in cahoots.

Charlie: Both of them like to eavesdrop.

Bert has his hand up.

Ms. Ames: Bert?

Bert: They like to look for things.

Ms. Ames: Is there a word for that?

Bert: Inquisitive.

Ms. Ames: Who was inquisitive in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*?

All students: Lucy.

Ms. Ames: What about in *My Side of the Mountain*?

All students: Sam.

Ms. Ames begins talking about the characters' names, noting that these were not the real names. She asks the class where these nicknames come from. Ms. Ames asks a boy named Larry who has red hair,

Ms. Ames: Has anyone ever called you Red?

Larry: No, but they have called me "Carrot Top" before.

Ms. Ames turns to another boy and asks,

Ms. Ames: Are you Charlie or Charles?

Charlie: My real name is Carlo.

Fieldnotes, Ms. Ames' classroom, 4/19/89

Discussion continued as students added celebrities and story characters to their list of nicknames.

Ms. Ames next reviewed three story elements they had learned the day before: plot, character, and setting. She wrote "setting" on a large paper tablet in front of the room and asked students what it meant. She next asked the group what the setting was for the story.

All students: A farm in Africa.

Ms. Ames: And in. . . .

All students: Modern times.

Under the words "farm in Africa" Ms. Ames writes "in modern times."

Ms. Ames: What's another word for modern?

Three hands go up.

All students: Present day.

Ms. Ames: Let's talk about characters, do they have to be people?

Ms. Ames writes the word "characters."

Julie: Towboy, Zeeley, Geeder.

Nancy: Part of the story Zeeley doesn't talk.

Ms. Ames: Is Zeeley a character then?

Several students say "yes."

Ms. Ames: No one mentioned Mr. Tabor.

Doug: They don't need him!

Fieldnotes, Ms. Ames' classroom, 4/19/89

To begin instruction on another day, Ms. Ames read a story prior to a spelling test. She explained, "I use this oral reading for vocabulary development as well as for predicting. The students love to predict." She also wrote that she chose to read a story because she tries to "read several times a day. Reading serves to focus the kids' attention." She told the us that she used reading for making transitions; her goal was to read to the students at least six times a day.

The spelling test was based on the theme of inventions. Ms. Ames commented that being able to apply spelling words was just as important as correct spelling. Again, the administration of this spelling test reflected Ms. Ames' instructional style of integrating various subjects or aspects of instruction.

Ms. Ames calls out the spelling words. After giving the word, she puts the word in the context of a sentence. Every now and then she breaks up the sequence by asking questions that a word might suggest.

Ms. Ames: Gravity. Who remembers the planet that had the least amount of gravity, the planet you would, therefore, weigh the least on?

Jennifer: Pluto.

Ms. Ames: Why did Pluto have the least amount of gravity?

Jennifer: Because it is the one farthest from the sun.

Ms. Ames: Submarine. Who knows what the base words for submarine is?

Mario: Sub.

Ms. Ames: Another idea? The base word is marine.

Ms. Ames explains how this gives *submarine* its meaning.

Ms. Ames: Skyscrapers. Why is that a good word for very tall buildings?

A girls raises her hand and offers,

Sandra: Because they scrape the sky.

Fieldnotes, Ms. Ames' classroom, 4/14/89

During a third reading lesson, students discussed the purpose of the story they had read and were asked to determine if the purpose was to entertain, inform, persuade, or see something in a different way. Students then worked in cooperative groups of three on an activity involving semantic mapping. They generated categories for words used in a mystery story, discussed whether the categories were appropriate, and made additions and corrections as necessary. The class also discussed adjectives that could be used in a mystery. Ms. Ames emphasized that all of these exercises were intended to activate students' prior knowledge. After these activities were completed, the class read a mystery story from the basal.

Understanding Decision Making

To understand decision making in Delta, we spoke with central office administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and children. In our analysis of the data, we attempted to build one model that would explain their entire decision making process. What became clear, however, was that there was not one, but several decision making processes operating concurrently in Delta. Mr. Hayes, a principal who was in his second year in the district, explained that district-level decisions were made in one of three ways: top-down, cooperatively (teachers provide input) or collaboratively (by committees). In addition, teachers, he felt, had a great deal of leeway at the classroom level.

> It's really two pronged. Certain decisions are made in a top down fashion with the superintendent meeting with administrators--by that I mean central office personnel as well as principals. Then that information is shared with the staff. The second one is more democratic in the sense that input is sought from the staff. . . that information is looked at by the administration, then a decision is made. Really there is a third

> way. . .the adoption committee is formed that will work with the central office or the principals, and then a decision is made.
>
> Mr. Hayes, principal, 4/4/89

When Mr. Hayes was asked to distinguish between the kinds of decisions that he made and those that were handed down from central office, he replied, "This is a pretty decentralized district. There is very little policy in this district." From Mr. Hayes's perspective, Delta was "a lot looser" than the district in which he previously worked. In that district, he had had to refer constantly to very specific procedural guidelines. In Delta, he received broad directives which were up to him to implement:

> You take reading as an example. The directive was that students could be placed at the junior high only halfway through a book with a maximum of one year above grade level. Now when it came to the building, and I think pacing is an important element to the reading program so we set some standard here, I set some standards here as far as kids functioning above and below grade level, how that was going to get reported to me and how we were going to manage the quality indicators as kids went through the program. That was a discretionary decision made by myself.
>
> Mr. Hayes, principal, 4/4/89

Our analysis of the data suggested, however, that decision-making procedures in Delta were in the process of change. The Superintendent, Dr. Harkin, put the various approaches in historical perspective when he described himself as an educational leader who had tried to bring some uniformity to the educational practices in Delta.

> If you go back six or seven years ago I believe the prerogative was more or less at the building level, or the classroom level, and they were using lots of different materials. . . . After I had been here a few years, I was getting the sense that there really was no direction coming to the teachers. It was all up to them individually, depending on their experience and background. So I thought we had too many things going, we needed to structure a little more. We adopted, at that point in time, one set of materials for reading. . . . I think this reading committee is coming back and saying that maybe is a little too structured.
>
> Dr. Harkin, superintendent, 4/4/89

Dr. Harkin also noted that, in this instance, he might have overreacted: "So I think that was about the most restrictive thing that I did. I am now saying this committee might come back to me and easily convince me to loosen up a bit."

Dr. Ellis, the assistant superintendent, agreed that decisions about materials and curriculum had become more centralized. Three years ago, it was up to individual schools to select additional materials such as workbooks. That decision was no longer up to the discretion of each school; instead the district provided all workbooks. The money for these materials, formerly in the budgets of each school, was now part of the district budget. However, Dr. Ellis emphasized that there were many opportunities for teachers to participate through the various school and district committees: "There's a lot of input. Everybody has an opportunity at least to give their input." He noted that teachers could influence decisions through direct participation on committees or through a representative from their building to the committees. As an example, he noted some teachers did not want to use a particular testing system in reading. The teachers had been required to enter students' answers into the computer, and students' scores were printed out. The program then provided the teacher with a prescription for each child, identifying which skills needed more practice and where in the textbook those skills were addressed.

Dr. Ellis said that there were some teachers who weren't "receptive to this"; as a result, use of the system became optional.

Dr. Harkin also talked about the value of having committees make decisions. His view was that he should place his trust in the expertise of the members of the various curriculum committees. In that way, decisions about classroom practice would be made by those who know classrooms and students best.

> I've got a reading committee who are experts compared to me, and I just have to listen to them and hope that I am intelligent enough to make the right decision, that is, to support them or not. So I think our decisions are made where they need to be, and that's with a group of teachers who have the interest or the knowledge of that area, have spent a considerable amount of time working on it and then come through the system with their recommendations. . . .I am almost a rubber stamp.
>
> Dr. Harkin, 4/14/89

Top-Down Decision Making

Dr. Singer, the principal of Delta I who had worked in the district for 17 years, explained about "top-down" decision making. When asked, for example, to give a picture of the decision-making process in Delta he responded:

> Decisions that affect me are primarily made by the Superintendent and the Board of Education.
>
> Dr. Singer, principal, 4/27/89

Indeed, Dr. Singer noted that he had "little or no input" on major decisions that affected his building and him. For example, he had been the principal of the Delta II School for 17 years--since the school opened. Then, two years before our study began, he was told that he was being transferred to Delta I. He also said that he would not be able to hire a new kindergarten teacher because there was another teacher "coming off maternity leave" who had to be placed somewhere. Ordinarily, however, he would get to make the final decision on hiring a teacher, after the assistant superintendent had given his approval. Dr. Singer commented that he did have control over some discretionary funds which could be used to develop innovative programs, but that those funds were minimal. Most of the money allocated for the Delta I school went toward textbooks and workbooks. Dr. Singer also spoke about the role that committees played in decision making. He said that a committee had determined the procedures he should use to evaluate the teachers in his building, and that he had little or no input into that decision.

From Dr. Singer's perspective, teachers preferred this top-down model, as they generally wanted minimal responsibility for decisions outside their own classroom:

> With decision making, I'm not too sure how much teachers should be involved. I think teachers basically want to teach. They want to go in the classroom and be responsible for what they're teaching their children. As far as being involved in a lot of committees that share in decision making and various things, I don't think they really want to be out of their classroom. I think they'd rather be in their classroom and have somebody make some of those decisions for them. This might be kind of pompous but

> I'm not even sure they're prepared to make these decisions. I'm not sure they have sufficient background experience to make them.
>
> Dr. Singer, principal, 4/27/89

All four teachers, while not necessarily agreeing with Dr. Singer's conclusions about what teachers wanted, did agree that many decisions in the district were made "top-down." As examples of this policy, they discussed the district-wide retention policy and the decision to shorten the lunch hour and eliminate recess.

Retention

A committee of three principals formulated a retention policy. Teachers were not involved in the process of establishing the policy. Indeed, when one teacher was asked if the principals had sought teacher input about retention, she replied:

> No. In fact, it came up when I said I have a child who is not really ready for junior high, the grades are not there. However, he had some Cs first quarter and I was told that according to the policy he needs to be failing first quarter. I said, what policy? And that is the first I had heard of the policy.

Teachers felt very strongly that they should have been able to participate in formulating district-wide policy about retention. Some teachers were upset about the way the policy had been formed and suggested that principals might have instituted the policy so that their "numbers" [on the state report card] would look "good":

> [The principal] felt that in February or March that he had at least five kids to retain--that I believe was for numbers sake and [so that he could say] he has everyone on grade level. He told the reading tutor that there would clearly be no need to get those children through *Finding Places*, which is the cutoff for retention. This is directly telling someone to stop teaching--no need to go on--we don't need progress from now on.

As another teacher explained:

> On the retention thing, I think [the superintendent was influenced by] the state report card. The state report card is fostering quite a few changes in the district. And one of the questions on it, they give the percentages of retention per building in the district. And I think we found that there is very little retention going on in our schools.

This teacher, and others, were not opposed to a retention policy per se, but simply felt teachers should have been involved:

> So, retention policy, I think, is a necessary thing and I think it is good, I just think it would be nice if teachers could give their input.

One teacher met with the superintendent to express her concerns with the way the policy was formulated. She reported:

> Now, when I spoke with the superintendent on it, he agreed with me. He did agree. He said the teachers will be given a chance to react to the policy.

Recess and Lunch

Teachers explained to us that state guidelines had mandated a 20-minute per day "movement education time aside from lunch and regular physical education time." However, in response to scores on the state test, the superintendent "shortened the lunch period, cut off recess for Grades 2-6 and decreased first-grade recess to three days." As one teacher noted, "We want some changes, we want our percentiles to go up, so what happens is that they cut out recess." Teachers felt that the children needed and were entitled to the recess time and that through administrative mandate, "administrators have taken some important decisions away from us."

Cooperative/Collaborative Decision Making

Our data suggested that the Educational Development Council (EDC), a relatively new structure, had been designed as an instructional and curricular decision-making body. It was comprised of teachers, principals, and the assistant superintendent. In addition, the superintendent, although not an official member of the EDC, attended some meetings and provided input and feedback regarding areas he thought needed attention. Ms. Betts, a member of the EDC, explained that the EDC was part of the teacher union initiative to involve teachers in district decision making, and that it was designed explicitly to give teachers more of a voice in district decision making. As a member of the EDC, Ms. Betts felt that she had an opportunity to make decisions that directly impacted teachers' freedom and control:

> We don't have a curriculum director, so a lot of decisions are made through this committee. I feel real good about this committee right now. I feel like we're setting some goals, we're setting directions. We've come up with the schemata on what subjects will come up. We have a four-year process on how it will be evaluated, how it will be chosen, how we will pick supplementary materials and even, obviously, what subject will come up at what time. And it's on a rotation basis. So, I feel real good about that. . . .
>
> We can tell them what we feel. . . .I think there's a little bit more listening.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

EDC membership was for two to three years. Nominations for membership came from a variety of sources; the district sought people who could represent diverse interests:

> The principal of your school submits a list. . .and the teacher's association president submits a list. They, then, sit down and compare the lists with the assistant superintendent and see if the names match up. They choose a person who will represent the school, the union, the district, and educational ideals.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

EDC was charged with district-wide planning--both short and long term. For example, Ms. Betts discussed the topics raised in a recent meeting:

> Yesterday we went through what. . .are we doing in the next couple of years. What are our goals for staff development? We. . .came up with a list. . . .We looked back at our schemata and asked what committees are in process or going to be beginning. . . .We decided we could not ignore [the materials selection process] so a lot of our institutes will be on those areas: how to choose a book, what to do with it once we have it, and what other supplementary materials are needed. We then discussed what other things teachers have been trained in. As a committee, we told

> each other what we're working on: assertive discipline, learning assessment pack, TESOL, etc. And. . .we asked how we are going to deal with this as a district. . . .
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

To accomplish their goals, EDC members also established both ad hoc and curriculum committees. Ad hoc committees were formed in order to promote district-wide initiatives such as assertive discipline, cooperative learning, whole group instruction, learning assessment packs, and Madeline Hunter techniques. Curriculum committees were charged with decisions about instruction and materials. As Dr. Harkin explained:

> Curriculum committees are supposed to decide what kinds of objectives we want to achieve with our students. Can we achieve those? Is it through a textbook or supplementary materials or a combination of them? Or do we write our own?
>
> Dr. Harkin, superintendent, 4/4/89

Ms. Betts explained from her perspective the function of the EDC relative to curriculum:

> We kind of look at a time line as to, well, it's been three years since we looked at this. It's time to look again now. [The Superintendent is] kind of the head of the time line situation.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

Ms. Betts indicated however that some members of the EDC were "pushing" for a curriculum director. She noted that the district had never had a curriculum director, that many felt one was needed:

> We're making these decisions saying, "This is what sounds good as a teacher, this is what we'd like to see". . . . Generally the person who is in charge is our assistant superintendent. . . . He's very open and a nice man, who supports us. . .[but] we'd like to know how a curriculum person [would approach these issues.]
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

Classroom Decision Making

Curriculum committees formed by principals made decisions about both curriculum and instruction. Teachers reported they felt that, within these constraints of time and materials, most of the decisions at the classroom level were made by teachers (e.g., the curriculum committee chose the "basic material," but teachers decided about supplementary materials and instruction). As Ms. Betts explained:

> I think I am very limited in that way [because the district mandates a basal], but I still do my own thing basically. . .I supplement in everything. . . . They have no problems with that at all, as long as they feel comfortable that we are generally using the book, the manual.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/19/89

When asked specifically about the kinds of decisions she felt she could make, Ms. Betts replied:

> I make hundreds of decisions a day. When I walk in in the morning, I decide what we're going to do for seatwork. . . .You will see that we use a phonics approach. One

> of the things is they get a sound pack every day. So I make hundreds of decisions a day. I decide on who is the leader for the day. . .I decide on what stories we're going to do. I decide on how we're going to do that when I begin reading groups. I decide if we're going to use whole language, if I'm going to use isolated words, if we're going to talk about sentences, if I'm going to talk about passages. And I do that every day. . .I make decisions in every subject I teach. I make decisions when I grade their papers. . .do I mark a backwards letter wrong in their spelling test? Is that considered a whole point wrong or should I decide on that being half a point if they spelled the word correctly? I think in every day I make decisions in everything I do.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/19/89

Ms. Ames agreed:

> We are pretty free on scheduling once we get past the art, music, P.E., and that's logical. From that point on we are free to do our own scheduling. We're free to choose who is going to be teaching what levels. It's kind of a rotation system. We're free. In our pods we do team teaching, and we're given pretty much freedom on that. . . .As far a field trips go, we're completely free on that.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/19/89

Other teachers felt that while there were a number of constraints there were at least times they could "close their door" and "do their own thing," such as literature units, plays, paper making, and even modifying basal instruction. As Ms. Jones, who taught fourth grade, had explained, "In my reading [class], the decision I've made is to abandon the regular curriculum when I have half the class, and to do plays."

Multiple Systems, Multiple Responses

Teachers. Teachers seemed to react quite differently to the decision making process in this district. As Ms. Betts noted:

> I think people are split. I think there are some people that feel like this year there's been a lot of decision making and they feel good about it. I feel that some people [think] it just comes down from the top--it's dictated. So I think people are split.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

Ms. Donovan felt that teachers were left out of the process unnecessarily:

> It seems like, lately the picture is that there are a lot of decisions being made at the top and that there are a lot of committees being formed that teachers are not on.
>
> Ms. Donovan, teacher, 4/14/89

Ms. Jones felt that there were some teachers who wanted more autonomy/more control. As she explained:

> I feel that other than textbooks, they [other teachers] feel they do not have enough of it [decision-making power].
>
> Ms. Jones, teacher, 4/21/89

However, *she* did not want to make more decisions. She felt that teachers who wanted to be involved in decision making need only join one of the curriculum committees. She seemed somewhat relieved to leave the chairing of curriculum committees and the task of policy making to administrators:

> We have enough to do with the classroom without researching or doing all this. If someone can help you, then you can do some of the little things from there, it's easier.
>
> Ms. Jones, teacher, 4/21/89

The teachers' association had recently formed a Committee on Excellence. Ms. Ames chaired that committee. She explained that the charge of the committee was to explore alternative approaches to decision making. Her perspective was that teachers liked "either the site-based decision making or shared decision making--[both of] which we [currently] do not have in our district."

Parents. Parents seemed concerned about decision making but, like the teachers, had mixed feelings about the process. As Ms. Thompson, a parent of a student at Delta I remarked:

> There's probably a conflict on that all the way around. Some probably agree with them and some don't agree with them.
>
> Ms. Thompson, parent, 4/27/89

Parents generally did not seem to feel that their voices were heard at the district level. For example, two of the parents talked about how dissatisfied parents were with the district's decision to fire their school janitors and hire a janitorial service in an effort to save money.

> With the janitorial business we were not happy at all. When it came right down to the final thing it was like we had no say so. Our petitions were done for nothing.
>
> Ms. Dalton, parent, 4/27/89

Ms. Dalton noted that parents could participate in decision making at the district level by voicing their opinions about issues, but she was not sure if it did any good. Ms. Thompson concurred:

> Myself and a lot of other people thought that the board already had their mind made up before they ever listened to any of us. That's the impression we got out of all the meetings we went too. They had two big meetings for all parents from the six elementary schools plus the junior highs that are in [our] district. We all went there and we all wanted our janitors to stay, but in the long run we didn't succeed in what we asked them for. They had their minds made up, at least that's what we feel.
>
> Ms. Dalton, parent, 4/27/89

Parents had differing opinions about their impact on individual schools. Ms. Myers noted what while administrators make final decisions, the principal of the school her child attended, Mr. Hayes, was "open to suggestions and he doesn't rule with an iron hand." She thought that "teachers probably determine the curriculum with help from the principal. It was cooperative decision making". In contrast, Ms. Thompson, whose child attended a different school, noted that she thought curriculum materials were "all handed down to the school probably from the district." As for parents' ability to participate in decision making, Ms. Temple saw some limitations.

> I think they probably consider our input, somewhat. Maybe not necessarily for their teaching through the year, but maybe a light touch here and there.
>
> Ms. Temple, parent, 4/4/89

Tensions

The individuals in Delta who participated in this study freely expressed their feelings about and reactions to the multifaceted decision making process described above. Their responses suggest not that they were uncomfortable with the existence of three decision making processes per se, but rather, that they were discomforted by the effects of such an approach. Some felt that Delta lacked a central organizing force. One teacher commented, for example,

> I think it would be a wise decision. . .to develop a schemata and stick with it. . . . Our EDC committee has finally decided to do this. The Institute planning committee has seemed to be totally randomly choosing speakers that might be anywhere from poor to good, but fitting into the scheme of things nowhere. . . .
>
> The district should have some kind of insight as to where they are going, what they are all about. . . .

Others felt frustrated by what they perceived to be inconsistencies: decisions that they thought would be made in one way (e.g., independently or through committees) that were ultimately made in another way (e.g., by administrative mandate.) As a result of these perceptions, both educators and parents in Delta sometimes felt as if they received "mixed messages," or, as one teacher noted, "I don't think the left hand knows what the right hand is doing, or that the right hand knows what the left is doing."

Four topics in particular seemed to be sources of frustration and tension: (a) membership on curriculum committees, (b) the equating of curriculum with a particular material, (c) administrative override of committee or teacher decisions, and (d) the relationship between policy and practice.

Membership on curriculum committees. Principals chaired the curriculum committees. Some of the teachers on the EDC felt that curriculum-committee membership and/or involvement should be open to everyone; however, administrators decided that they would be responsible for choosing the teachers whom they would like to see in the committees. Ms. Ames explained the membership process:

> The EDC decided that any teacher that wanted to apply to a committee can apply. . . . There is a principal [who is] chairperson. . . . From all the applicants he selects his committee. . . . He tries to represent each school. . . . We don't have each grade level represented, but we do have each school.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/14/89

Ms. Betts noted that committee membership was basically for "volunteers and people who are really interested in the subject area" and noted that they consistently "ended up with a volunteer from every school." Ms. Ames added:

> We have a lot of teachers who will say exactly what they think, and that's fortunate. Those are the ones I'd like to see get on these committees, because we don't want the committee to be a rubber stamp for what a principal wants.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/14/89

There was some concern, however, that administrators often asked teachers to join committees despite the fact that they were not necessarily experts in the area. For example, the teachers on the reading committee decided that only teachers with a master's degree in reading should serve on the committee. But, Ms. Ames, who does not hold such a degree, was recruited by the chair:

> I got a call from the chairperson asking me to be on it [the reading committee]. I said, "Well, I don't really have that much of a background [in reading]." Well, he used to be my principal, and he says, "Well, you are a practitioner. I want you on the committee."
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/14/89

Ms. Donovan was also asked to be on the reading committee. However, she declined the offer because she felt she was more qualified to be on the social studies committee. She felt strongly that people knowledgeable about reading should be on the reading committee and, similarly, that someone knowledgeable about reading should be at "the helm" of the reading curriculum:

> I think that there are a lot of committees being formed with administrators chairing the committees with teachers on them, but not necessarily is everybody well versed or knows what's really going on.
>
> Ms. Donovan, teacher, 4/14/89

Equating curriculum with a particular material. Curriculum development, which followed a six-year cycle, was closely tied to materials selection:

Year 1:	The committee examines the current program. A course of study is written and sent to publishers of textbooks.
Year 2:	The committee looks at the responses from publishers in order to select two or three candidates for consideration. Committee representatives explain the strengths and weaknesses of each textbook series to the teachers in their building. Teacher give their opinions regarding these textbooks. The goal is to reach a consensus throughout the district about which series to adopt. Finally the committee makes a recommendation to the Educational Development Council. If they approve the recommendation then it is sent to the Superintendent, and finally, to the School Board.
Year 3:	The new textbook series is adopted and implemented. A needs assessment is conducted to determine what in-service sessions are needed to facilitate the implementation of the new series. In addition, a needs assessment helps to determine what supplementary materials are needed.
Year 4:	The committee evaluates the new program and continues to provide in-service sessions.
Years 5 & 6:	Lay off period--the curriculum is in place.

Curriculum was, therefore, almost synonymous with a particular material. Indeed, many of the people interviewed suggested that curriculum was the material. Dr. Singer, for example, noted, "textbook adoption. . .basically, that's our curriculum," while Mr. Hayes commented, "They've defined the

curriculum as the materials." Ms. Betts, while commenting that "being on the reading committee doesn't mean that we're going to look at a new reading series," added that when a book was chosen, "we just have one rep we can ask questions of and they kind of screen it down from, say, 20 publishers, to 10, then to 5."

Mr. Hayes was concerned about instructional problems that this policy caused:

> Take reading. They adopted a reading text and that was it. What that tells me is that the focus is the book, not instruction. So that, to a certain extent, dictates things. But I think it dictates more a philosophy towards reading than does the choices the staff has to make. When you adopt a text then you should support that with a whole in-service component. The philosophy here is the text. What we're valuing is the text, not all these strategies and other important components.
>
> Mr. Hayes, principal, 4/4/89

However, he indicated that this focus on the text might be changing:

> But this district, thank God, is moving more into strategies. The philosophy is beginning to change.
>
> Mr. Hayes, principal, 4/4/89

Ms. Donovan also felt that the focus should be broader:

> I feel that now the current committee should be addressing how can we best supplement this text? My first-grade cohorts and I feel that any success we are seeing now has not been due to the Heath series, but our eclectic approach to supplementing it. We use a phonics manual as a supplement because it gives a better foundation than what the text provides. We were quite upset to find that it was cut from the budget. After about a month of negotiating with our principal, we did get them. Other schools do not have them and must photocopy pages from books. Grade-level meetings have confirmed this and learned that most primary teachers, if given a chance, want them.
>
> Ms. Donovan, teacher, 4/14/89

Mr. Ellis told us that, in some content areas, the equating of curriculum with a textbook had recently begun to change and was becoming broader:

> Last year in social studies . . . they decided not to go with a new series . . . the teachers themselves decided to draft their own curriculum for the primary grades, particularly.
>
> Now there are committees deciding what it is they want at first grade, [committees of] first-grade teachers.
>
> Now the reason I tell you this is because it's not the standard way that it has happened in the past. So it can happen that way. It can happen that way in reading.
>
> Mr. Ellis, assistant superintendent, 4/4/89

Administrative influence/override. Teachers generally saw the curriculum committees as the mechanism through which they could offer the most input (in terms of district decision making). It was through

committee participation, for example, that teachers had the opportunity to evaluate textbooks that were being considered for district-wide adoption. Even though the committee membership did not include every teacher in the district, every teacher did participate informally by providing feedback on decisions about possible textbook adoptions.

However, decisions made by committees were sometimes influenced and even overruled by the administration. For example, for several years, the district adopted more than one basal reading series. The superintendent then decided that it would be preferable to have only one basal. Teachers voted on three different possibilities. The vote was tied between two. The superintendent picked the third.

Policy versus practice. All four teachers seemed to feel that decision making in their district was primarily top-down. By top-down decision making, they meant that the superintendent, assistant superintendent, and school board held most of the power in the district. From their perspective, below the central administration, in descending power, were the EDC, curriculum and policy committees, individual teachers, parents, and students. Because of this structure, teachers often felt left out of policy decisions. As Ms. Ames noted,

> Teachers are very involved in curriculum, but when it comes to policy, we aren't involved quite as much. We have policy committees that are formed that are basically administrators.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/14/89

Teachers became particularly frustrated when policy decisions affected teaching practices. As an example, Ms. Ames explained that the members of the district committee on retention were all administrators. Similarly, Ms. Betts reported that she did not even know about a new library policy until some of her students experienced problems checking out books. She also noted that she used a lot of Madeline Hunter techniques because she was told that she had to use them. Ms. Ames reported that she was told to use "assertive discipline." Ms. Jones noted the administrative decision to reduce the teacher's lunch period from 60 to 45 minutes. Teachers preferred that the administrators not participate as actively in decisions that affected the classroom.

Understanding Assessment and Instruction

The Impact of Formal Assessment

During the period in which we interviewed and observed, it was evident that formal assessment was having a significant impact on the decisions that were being made in this school district. Indeed, it was reported that most of the changes the district had undertaken in the past couple of years had occurred in response to students' performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the new state reading test. Delta wanted to raise test scores and improve instruction. Dr. Harkin explained:

> We weren't particularly happy with what we had done on the Iowa a few years ago. We had looked to see why we didn't do better, and we thought it was because of our bilingual students. Then the state [reading] test came along and we did much worse than we thought we would. That triggered the response of everybody in the district. We thought we can do better. Maybe it's time just to start all over.
>
> Dr. Harkin, superintendent, 4/4/89

Dr. Harkin felt that the pressure generated by the state test scores would result in positive changes:

> Maybe the state forced us into changing or looking at things more seriously. So maybe it is all for the best. [Teachers] now say there are some things in here that really are helping us, and we're beginning to understand what we don't know.
>
> Dr. Harkin, superintendent, 4/4/89

Ms Ames agreed:

> I think [the state assessment] is good. I think it's good to the extent that it is making districts focus on reading and math and language arts. It's good. We need it. . .I know a lot of people say we have the tail wagging the dog on this, but maybe school districts need to be shaken up a bit.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/14/89

Delta's response to the test scores, to "start over," took many forms. The district activated curriculum committees to rethink goals, instruction, and materials. They asked for outside consultants to give advice. They formed policy committees to consider issues regarding retention and homework. They shortened the lunch hour and eliminated recess. They began to change classroom practices. They asked to participate in this research project. Indeed, Mr. Hayes noted that one of the reasons he had agreed to participate in the study was because he thought that, by being involved, Delta might get insights which would help them improve their reading instruction:

> The staff needs to see reading differently than it's traditionally been taught. I'm putting more emphasis on strategy involvement, more of an emphasis on reading itself and more of an emphasis on enjoyment. So I am impacting, I hope. That's why I signed up for this study. I want to impact the decisions they make.
>
> Mr. Hayes, principal, 4/4/89

Impact on Reading Instruction

In response to test results, the reading committee was asked to begin its cycle early:

> Reading should be going into its developmental stage next year, but because of all of the excitement over the state assessment, reading was activated one year earlier than normal.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/14/89

The initial task of the committee was to reevaluate curriculum and materials relative to the state test:

> Basically, we just had to rewrite the goals for the state assessment for third and sixth [grade], adopt the text, and, then, take the curriculum we had and. . .look at the text and try to make it fit.
>
> Ms. Donovan, teacher, 4/14/89

Because the state reading test assessed students' awareness and use of reading strategies, the reading committee also decided to organize workshops to train teachers at all grade levels to provide instruction on reading strategies. They felt that this was necessary because what was assessed on the state test was

not consistent with what the children had been taught. Reading instruction, therefore, needed to change. As Ms. Betts explained:

> [The children] have never had to think in gray. I mean, they're so used to these black and white answers. . .I think the test is very difficult for third graders. I think that's a hard concept to ask a child at that level to do. . .I think you're asking children to do things that, maybe, they're not always ready for. I'm not saying we can't expose them to it. We do it in first grade. The first graders hate when I say, "well maybe." They want to know. Well, what do you mean, yes or no? But I want them to know that the answer some days will be "maybe." And I do that on purpose because the test is a lot of "maybes." And they don't like to have to think in grays and to interpret. And I realize that that's a part of your goal in reading, is to get them to interpret and that higher level thinking. And its tough to get kids to do that, especially when you see that they're struggling through isolated words. And to get meaning out of this is really tough.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

Ms. Donovan agreed: "We are testing gray areas. We are testing things that kids have not been exposed to ever. . . . A lot of kids don't think of maybes. . .it's not taught."

During the workshops they designed, members of the reading committee taught strategies such as "ways to activate prior knowledge" and "semantic mapping." Ms. Ames, for example, had been in charge of showing other teachers how to teach the strategy "probable causes." She reported that she chose this strategy as a way of teaching "topic familiarity", a section on the state reading test, which she explained was synonymous with "pre-reading:"

> We try to impress on teachers that [prereading] is really important. It is probably the most important instruction because if you set the scene the kids are going to be ready for it and will learn more, so we try to get that across to them. I had to buy into it myself before I could [train others]. . . .
>
> What I did [for institute day] was I just took a strategy and I did it. The one I did was called probable causes. I don't know if you are familiar with this one. It's where you introduce the vocabulary and then the children do some writing using that vocabulary, before they are aware of the story. And the teachers had a good time with it. And this is what we will be doing in the next. . .three to five years. [Our plan is to have] inservicing of teachers with many of these strategies, not that they have to use them all, but we want them to be aware of what is out there.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/14/89

During the workshop, the reading committee also helped teachers develop classroom reading tests that would be similar in format to the state test. These tests would provide students with an opportunity to get ready for the state test:

> What we did on our Institute Day was the reading people took their grade level through the assessment test. Because we felt the assessment test does not hit just third and sixth and eighth, we included all the grade levels. So, I did all the fifth-grade teachers and I took them through a mock assessment test. Then we sat and we wrote an assessment test for stories in our reading book.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/14/89

Both teachers and administrators reported feeling the impact of the state test. Ms. Betts explained the effect on teachers:

> They feel very frustrated with it. It's very frustrating. . . . [You work hard every day] and suddenly these scores come out and say, "Well, you're just not teaching reading correctly." You know, that's very frustrating. You can't help but blame yourself. "What else can I be doing?" "How many more things can we do to help them get through this?"
>
> The Illinois State Test has greatly influenced our teaching techniques. It has influenced us with topic familiarity and all those types of subjects that are covered in the test. We are now covering those kinds of things in the first grade. And that's why you're seeing me doing things like the mapping in first grade. The [state reading test] influenced us in a tough way because we didn't score as well as other districts.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

Principals were similarly affected. Because of test scores, they were asked to monitor the pace of instruction by collecting basal end-of-unit test scores in math and reading every Friday from each teacher. This information was entered into a computer database, and a record of student scores was sent to the assistant superintendent and the superintendent. This policy was designed to ensure that all teachers in the district covered math and reading at the same pace. Dr. Harkin instituted the pacing policy because he felt that teachers wanted some guidelines regarding where they should be in their curriculum materials. He explained that the central office provided pacing guidelines, and then it was up to the principal and teachers to decide how to proceed within their school. Mr. Hayes, for example, met with his staff on a monthly basis to review students' performance on the basal unit tests, their school ability index scores, and total scores on the ITBS. They used this information, along with input from teachers, to decide whether the pacing was appropriate, and whether a child should be moved to a new group or whether a child needed some special services. Mr. Hayes explained:

> I think pacing is an important element to the reading program, so we set some standards here. I set some standards here as far as percentage of kids functioning above and below grade level [and] how we were going to manage the quality indicators as kids went through the program. . . .
>
> Mr. Hayes, principal, 4/4/89

In contrast, Dr. Singer noted that Delta I teachers used the tests that came with the reading series but that teachers had quite a bit of leeway to make their own decisions about pacing and testing. He did not monitor the outcome of these tests to the extent that Mr. Hayes did at Delta II. He thought, however, his behavior might be the exception rather than the rule:

> There are probably. . .principals who meet more often with the staff to check on pupil progress and work on pacing and things like that.
>
> Dr. Singer, principal, 4/27/89

Assessment in the Classroom

The four teachers who participated in this study all reported using multiple sources of information in order to make instructional decisions (see Figure 1). While data from norm- and criterion-referenced measures were often mentioned as useful (Ms. Jones, for example, talked about looking at children's scores on the Iowa to assess strengths and weaknesses and using information from the computer print

out of test data provided by the district), teachers reported relying most heavily on the information they obtained from observing and interacting with the children in their classroom. This type of knowledge, which teachers reported they usually kept in their "heads," accounted for 39% of all teacher talk about assessment (see Figure 2). As Ms. Betts explained:

> I think the informal is more valuable to me [than basal test scores]. . .the everyday work. Did they finally grasp what we did during the day or did they grasp a skill that we did all week? Let's see if you can pick out these words. Let's see if you can match the pictures. Let's see if you can read the words, period. So I think that you're constantly informally evaluating when I'm standing in front of the classroom with the group, when I'm looking at papers that they did. . . . We're always checking, we're always looking, we're always walking around.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

[Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here.]

Ms. Jones seemed to agree. In response to a researcher's question about how she would determine if a child understood a story, she noted, "In discussion, I'd find out." She also noted that she kept a file of each child's writing, which she looked at at the end of the year, in order to gauge progress. Ms. Ames and Ms. Donovan provided other examples of informal assessment:

> I have key people in the group who would be having the most trouble with the concepts. I'll call on them. . .and I just feel that if it's really getting to them, then the rest of the children are understanding.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/21/89

> When I start a new book, we do the majority of it together for the first week. . . . A week later, I will start to see from there--who's sinking, who's swimming. . . . If I'm listening, I should be able to get it.
>
> Ms. Donovan, teacher, 4/21/89

Teachers often used informal assessment data to place students with particular materials or groups. If the textbook seemed to be too easy for a particular child, for example, the teacher gave the child a basal end- of-unit or chapter test so that the child could "test out" of the material (by getting a score of 80% or better) and move to the next basal in the district mandated series. When asked, for example, if she had the authority to change reading group placements, Ms. Betts explained:

> I think I really do. I do. I mean, basically when they come in they are grouped. But I think at this point they're not that far apart from each other. You know, what's one book? If they can read, they can read. And I just test them out of it. Basically that's what they ask of us--that we make sure that we test them and make sure that they've mastered the basic skills that are required. . . . As far as changing them, I've been watching Vanessa to see if I can move her up to the next book. If I thought that she could move to the next book, what I would do is give her the end of book test in the book she's in. And then I would put her in with the next group.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/19/89

In this fashion, students who were successful at one level, were moved to another. By "testing out", it was possible for students to skip some of the books in the series. "In fact, " as Ms. Donovan explained,

"this whole *Moving On* group, we skipped the primer." She noted, however, that she thought this had happened because of other reading activities, including a phonics workbook, that she was using in the room. "If we sat around waiting for what comes in the basal, we wouldn't be able to move as quickly."

By observing children, teachers were also able to identify children who were having difficulty with the basal. While some teachers reported that they would only move children up to a higher group, other teachers reported that they moved children to both higher and lower groups in an attempt to match the child to the material:

> If I have someone who is really having difficulty, I have gone through the remedial steps, I have done the reteaching and given them additional work, and they still seem to be having a problem--and by seem to be having a problem, I mean worksheets they are doing for me, discussion, writing that they are doing for me--I can see that the same problem is showing up that is supposedly corrected. If this continues, then we would change the placement immediately rather than wait until next year. So when I finally finish this book--and I will be, I'm in the sixth unit right now, I have one more unit after this--when I finish the book, the children that I finish with will feel confident that they will be able to go into the next book.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/21/89

Teachers also used data from observations and interactions to determine whether or not students had mastered the material they had presented and to plan subsequent instruction:

> I had a sequence thing. . .and there was a sequence of the story that they had just read that they had to put in the correct order. Well, [if they didn't do well on it] in discussion I'd find out if it was knowledge of the story. If it's still a sequencing problem, I do use the Reading Skills Kit to reteach and reinforce.
>
> Ms. Jones, teacher, 4/28/89

> I do occasionally, when I find on the workbook that there is some confusion, I will go to the skill pack and take out those pages and staple them together and reteach.
>
> Ms. Ames, teacher, 4/21/89

> You're always monitoring, you're always wondering if they understand things. That's why we have the review skills. Did they get it the first time or did they get it yesterday? It helps me plan for the next day.
>
> Ms. Betts, teacher, 4/14/89

"Having a hard time"
"Doing what I think is important"

These two remarks, excerpted from the interviews we held with Delta educators, capture our sense of what Delta seemed to be experiencing at the time of our visit. The first remark was made by Ms. Jones. Explaining about some budgeting decisions that the district had recently made and that each year there seemed to be less and less money to work with, she had remarked, "They're having a hard time, so we're having a hard time." Ms. Jones' remark seemed to hold true across the district. We had a sense that the district generally was "having a hard time" and that all educators in Delta shared in that "hard time." The second remark was made by Ms. Donovan, when expressing her opinion about outside/external

pressures. She reported that she explained to her principal, "No matter what happens on the outside, I still do what I think is important."

From our limited perspective (we were, after all, only in the district on three days and only asked certain questions), these two remarks seemed to ring true for all the educators with whom we interacted. The district as a whole seemed to be feeling a great deal of pressure because of their test scores, to be trying a number of ways to improve test scores, and to improve the education they were providing. Some of the ways they were trying were inconsistent with each other. There were also some inconsistencies among their decision-making systems. But, in spite of all that was occurring, teachers, principals, and central office staff all seemed to be committed to doing what they felt was important to do, for the good of the system and of the participants in it.

We had been invited into Delta. Some of the Delta educators hoped that, by participating in this study, they might learn some things that would help address the difficulties, the "hard time," that they were experiencing. From our early contact with them, we were aware that they faced tensions and frustrations--tensions and frustrations that grew from good intentions, from wanting to do what it was they felt it was "important" to do.

Our overriding sense was that we had visited a district in transition, a district in the midst of change, a district in the process of sorting out where they wanted to go and how they wanted to get there. We left, encouraged by the efforts that were being made, hoping that Delta succeeded in reaching its goals, hypothesizing that should we revisit in another five years, the tensions we witnessed would have served as a generative force. As Dr. Harkin concluded:

> We are beginning to understand what we don't know. . . . I can see everybody being ready for change and that's the first major step. . .I think we're ready. If enough people can come with information we can use, I think my faculty is ready.
>
> Dr. Harkin, superintendent, 4/4/89

Table 1

Demographic Data for Delta

	Total Enrollment K-5	Average Class Size	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% Native American	% Low Income	Student Mobility Rate	% Not Promoted
Delta I	298	25	85.2	1.3	7.7	5.7	0.0	5.0	20.5%	0.3
Delta II	416	28	94.5	0.5	2.9	2.2	0.0	1.2	13.2%	1.2
District Average		25	82.0	0.5	12.3	5.0	0.1	7.4	22.3%	2.9

Source: 1988 State Report Cards

Figure 1. Uses of Assessment: Teachers' Perspectives

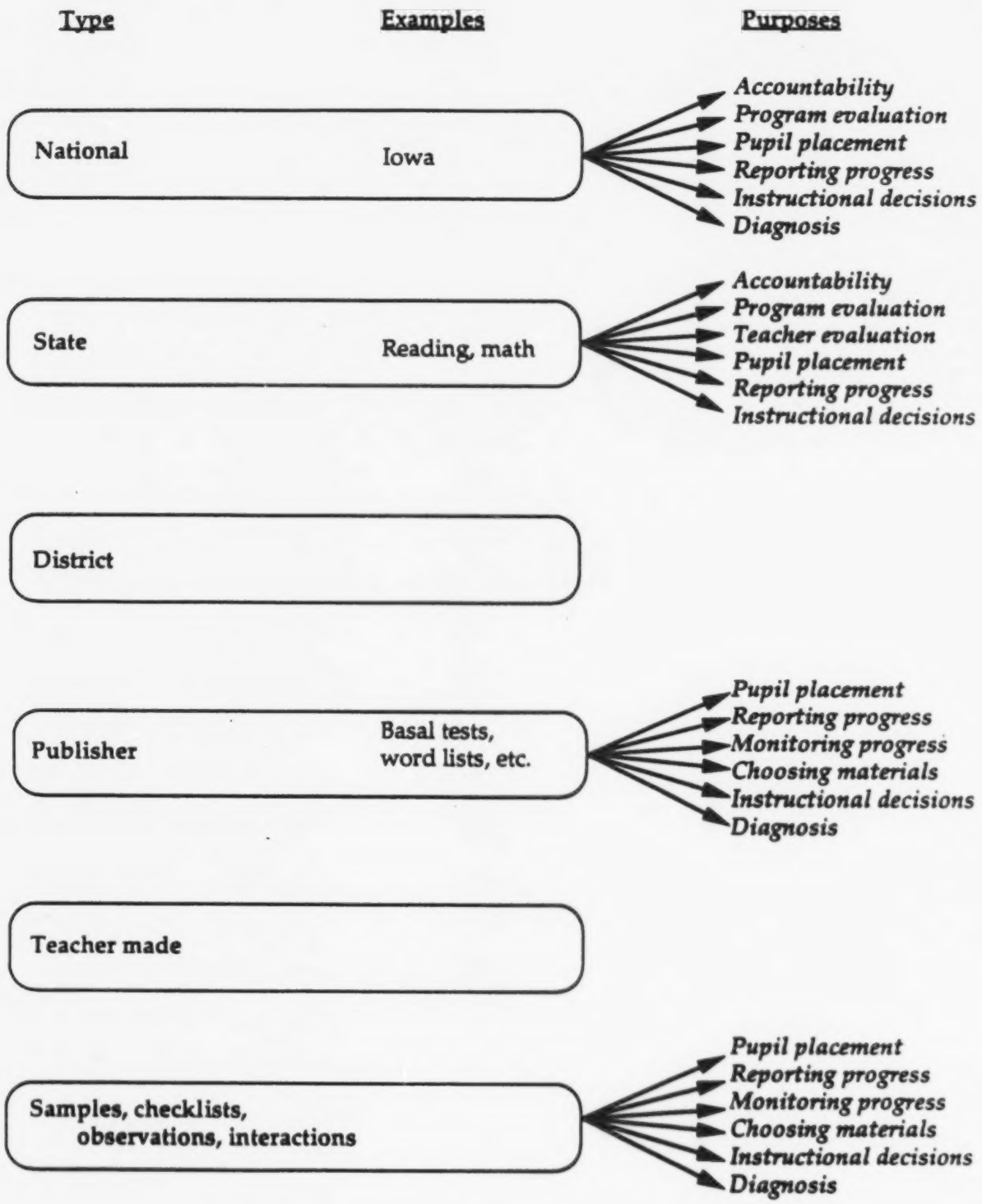
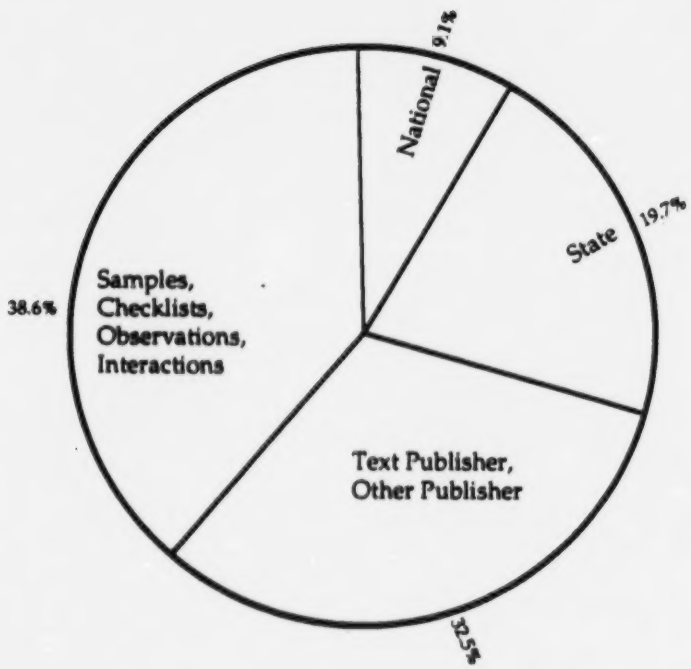


Figure 2. Approximate Amounts of Teacher Talk, by Type of Assessment (in Lines):



		% of Talk
National	108 lines	9.1%
State	233 lines	19.7%
District	0 lines	0.0%
Text Publisher, Other Publisher	384 lines	32.5%
Teacher Made	0 lines	0.0%
Samples, Checklists, Observations, Interactions	456 lines	38.6%

Appendix A

University of Illinois
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Center for the Study of Reading

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An announcement about a proposed research project at the Center for the Study of Reading at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

A group of us at the Center for the Study of Reading have recently been involved in research on assessment. In addition to our work with the state-wide assessment here in Illinois, we have also been studying the role of reading assessment in schools nationally; for example, we have recently completed an extensive national survey to try to better understand the relationship between reading assessment and instruction in our nation's schools.

As a follow up to that broad survey, we are interested in trying to understand the same assessment-instruction relationship from a much more "contextualized" perspective--by working with teachers, administrators, students, parents, and policy-makers to understand how that relationship works in "their" school(s). So we are designing a national study, with four to six districts in Illinois and a like number from outside the state. In each district we would like to select two schools and four classrooms (two per school) to work with more intensively.

We would talk with administrators, school board members, parents, teachers, students and support personnel in order to understand decision making from a variety of perspectives. In addition, we'd like to spend a goodly part of each of 4-8 school days, over the next four months, observing two teachers in each school. We want to understand the kinds of decisions they make on a daily basis and how they use a variety of formal and informal assessment practices to make those decisions. So we would not only observe but also talk with them about those observations.

We see this research as an opportunity for us to better understand classroom practice and teacher decision-making, particularly from the perspective of the data teachers use and how they use it to make those decisions. We see this as an opportunity for the teachers, schools, and districts who get involved to better understand their own practices in the context of how other teachers, schools, and districts approach these same issues. Our intent is to create an environment in which everyone involved has something to learn and benefit from. We would like our cooperating teachers and other school personnel to participate as fully as they would like--perhaps meeting with us to discuss findings and, if they so desire, to work with us as we seek to share findings and insights with a broader audience.

For those who will participate only in an interview, the time commitment is modest, perhaps an hour per person at the outside. For the two teachers per school with whom we work, it is a different story. We realize that 4-8 days of being observed and talking with observers is time-consuming and puts additional demands on professionals whose time is already highly taxed. We realize too that the invitation to become learners in a cooperative venture may seem more attractive to us than to busy professionals. We are hoping, though, that some teachers will see this as an opportunity and work with us to eliminate the research/practice division that so often hinders communication between university and public school educators. Frankly, we do not think we can ever really understand the assessment-instruction link without seeing it happen in classrooms and then having the opportunity to reflect on decisions we observed with the teachers who made them.

In exchange for this help, we can offer these incentives:

- Each participating school will receive a narrative report of decision-making/assessment practices in their school.
- Each participating school and district will receive a copy of our synthesis of the 8-12 sites with whom we work.
- We will hold working sessions so that educators from both the university and the public school can work together to understand and share the implications of our case studies.
- We will also secure tuition and fee for participating teachers.
- The principal investigator is willing to volunteer to work with any school or district level curriculum or assessment planning committees to the degree that they would like his involvement.

This is an exciting time to be involved in education. We think this assessment research offers an opportunity for school and university to work together and to make a difference in the lives of teachers, researchers and children.

We hope you will accept our invitation to become involved.

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APPENDIX B

Interview Codes

Slot 1
Talking About

a. Self
b. Superintendent
c. Assistant Super.
d. Board Member
e. Staff Devl. (person)
f. Consultant
g. Principal
h. Teacher
i. Student
j. Parent
k. State
l. District
m. Administration
n. Staff Dev. (program)
o. Decision Making
p. Curriculum
q. Instruction
r. Assessment
s. Discipline
t. Materials
u. Classroom
v. School
w. Committees
x. Town
y PTA
aa. Asst. Principle
ab. Social Worker
ac. Education
ad. Budget
af. Salesman

Slot 2
Type

21 Philosophy
22 Policy
23 Practice

Slot 3
Source

301 Mandate
302 Board of Ed.
303 Superintendent
304 Principal
305 Colleague
306 Staff Development
307 Book
308 Teacher Education
309 Personal Experience
310 Experience as a student
311 Teaching Experience
312 Intuition
313 Can't Identify
314 State
315 Professional Meeting
316 Reflection
317 Source
318 Asst. Super.

Slot 4
Control

401 Self
402 Cooperative
403 Committee
404 Teacher
405 Principal
406 School
407 District
408 State
409 Student
410 Aide
411 Superintendent
412 Asst. Super.
413 PTA
414 Union
415 Ad
416 Board
417 Parent

Slot 5
Participation

51 Mandatory
52 Voluntary

Slot 6
Types of Assess.

601 National
602 State
603 District
604 Text Publisher
605 Other Publisher
606 Teacher Made
607 Samples
608 Checklist
609 Informal
610 Dynamic

Slot 7
Uses/Role of Assess.

701 Accountability
702 Program Evaluation
703 Teacher Evaluation
704 Pupil Placement
705 Reporting Pupil Progress
706 Monitor Pupil Progress
707 Choosing Materials
708 Instructional Decisions
709 Diagnosis

Observation Codes

Slot 1
Task Definition

1 Assessment
2 Behavior Management
3 Classroom Acitivty
4 Planning/ Schedule
5 Non-Academic

Slot 2
Grouping

201 Whole/T
202 Small/T
203 Indiv/T
204 Whole/NoT
205 Small/NoT
306 Indiv/NoT

Slot 3
Content

301 Social Studies
302 Science
303 Math
304 Literature
305 Reading
306 Writing
307 Grammar
308 Spelling
309 Phonics
310 Vocabulary
311 Music
312 P.E.
313 Drama
314 Art
315 Other
316 Health

Slot 4
Materials

400 None
401 Text
402 Basal
403 Trade Book
404 Workbook/sheet
405 Blank Paper
406 Kit
407 Manipulative
408 Computer
409 Tape Recorder
410 Other Gadgets
411 Art Supplies
412 Chalkboard
413 Homemade Book
414 Reference Material
415 Test
416 Other
417 Film/Movie

Slot 5
Type of Activity

(Use only with Slot 1 #3)
501 Telling
502 T/SR
503 Scaffold
504 Discussion

Slot 6
Type of Assessment

(Use only with Slot 1 #1)
601 National
602 State
603 District
604 Txt Publisher
605 Other Publisher
606 Teacher made
607 Samples
608 Checklist
609 Informal
610 Dynamic

APPENDIX C

Demographic Data

	Average Class Size	% White	% Black	% Hispanic	% Asian	% Native American	% Low Income	Student Mobility Rate	% Not Promoted
Alpha	25	71.3	20.3	1.3	7.0	0.1	32.7	23.6%	1.7
Beta	22	65.7	30.5	8.5	2.4	0.1	23.2	26.2%	1.8
Gamma	25	93.1	1.4	0.6	4.7	0.2	0.5	12.4%	0.7
Delta	25	82.0	0.5	12.3	5.0	0.1	7.4	22.3%	2.9

Source: 1988 State Report Cards

APPENDIX D

State Assessment Scores

1988 Grade 3	Alpha	A one	A two	Beta	B one	B two	Gamma	G one	G two	Delta	D one	D two
	254	273	261	254	229	270	302	277	308	264	252	257
Q 4	39	46	39	38	22	45	53	40	57	37	31	39
3	19	25	21	22	27	21	27	28	25	29	24	22
2	20	14	17	19	27	15	15	22	16	23	34	22
1	22	14	23	21	24	20	5	11	3	12	12	17
Grade 6	265	261	265	257			298			255		
Q 4	33	34	31	29			44			28		
3	25	20	31	26			31			31		
2	24	34	16	26			18			21		
1	18	12	22	18			7			20		
1989 Grade 3	272	278	272	274	234	256	304	320	314	296	269	255
Q 4	43	48	39	42	29	39	55	62	56	49	35	24
3	24	26	28	26	26	24	25	21	27	31	33	43
2	17	14	23	17	22	18	14	15	14	13	20	19
1	16	12	9	15	24	20	6	2	3	8	11	14
Grade 6	256	282	234	241			314			269		
Q 4	35	40	33	31			55			36		
3	22	21	20	20			22			28		
2	17	13	13	20			17			20		
1	26	27	35	29			7			16		